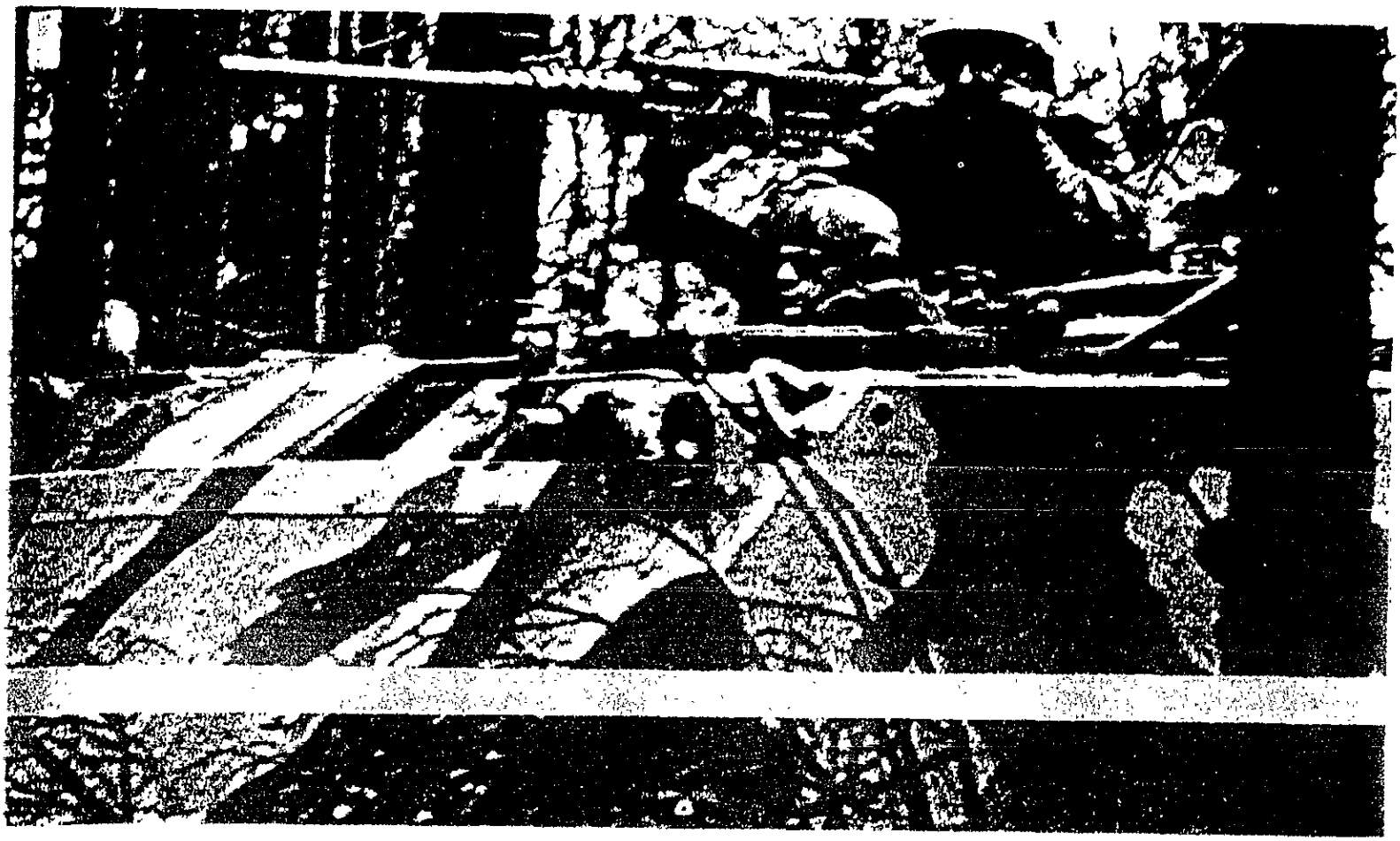


European Reconnaissance Patrols

Captain David R. Breuhan

During the 1988 Boeselager Competition, hosted annually by the West German Army, the Reconnaissance Platoon of the 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry, equipped with M113A2s, participated as one of the 24 teams from 14 NATO countries.

The competition includes eight events in which eight-man teams are tested over a four-day period on their scouting skills. The most important event is the mounted reconnaissance patrol, or "day recon." In this event, a patrol is required to maneuver, conducting a zone reconnaissance through enemy territory, for 25 to 35 kilometers. The objective is to report enemy locations, avoid being killed, and reach an observation post (OP) within a given period of time.

In preparing the team for the day recon competition, I wrote a training manual for maneuver, and the information presented here is taken from that manual. Although this information is especially applicable to units in Europe, many of the tactics could also be incorporated into the standing operating procedures (SOPs) of stateside units to improve their chances of surviving on the battlefield.

Some of the German tactics do not directly parallel those of the U.S. Army, but the *Bundeswehr* must follow doctrine that is based upon the type of vehicles and weapons it uses when maneuvering. For example, the Germans emphasize road-bound scouting because they use wheeled reconnaissance vehicles.

Highlighted here are the unique variations and the action-on-contact drills that can be most easily adopted by U.S. forces. Although this discussion follows a patrol from the operations order (OPORD) to actions on the objective, reconnaissance platoon leaders will want to pay particular attention to the section on the conduct of the patrol.

The first order of business is assembly area procedures. The purpose of any assembly area (AA) is to provide a secure environment in which to prepare for combat operations. Many units have their own SOPs for assembly areas, and these SOPs can also contain specific instructions for issuing the OPORD. (The best, most detailed OPORD format can be found in the U.S. Army's Ranger Handbook, ST 21-75-2.)

Once in the assembly area, the patrol leader places the assistant patrol leader in command and moves with one scout to the mission briefing. This scout should be the patrol's radiotelephone operator (RTO). He can help copy graphics or make

a copy of the order for the assistant patrol leader.

There are other important assembly area procedures: The radio speakers are turned off, but the patrol continues to monitor the radio and maintain 360-degree security. The patrol members never assume that any area is secure, and they make sure all vehicle track markings on the ground are erased. Before going off to receive the OPORD, the patrol leader tells the assistant patrol leader where he will give the order to the patrol members when he comes back. Also, he gives a number combination to the assistant patrol leader.

When he returns and issues his OPORD, the patrol leader includes the following information in addition to the normal list of OPORD essentials:

Situation: He points out the direction from which the enemy is coming, points to the north, and points to his location on the map. He discloses the missions and locations of the adjacent friendly patrols and points out the possibility that the patrol may get a fragmentary order to link up with a friendly patrol once the mission is under way.

Mission: All pertinent information—who, what, when, where, how—is included.

Execution: All of the submissions are included and called in as accomplished.

- Scheme of maneuver. Dominant terrain is highlighted along the route, and the route to passage point is described in detail.
- Plan of fire support. Supporting units are listed.
- Coordinating instructions. All action-on-contact drills are briefed.
- Service support. Support is briefed as necessary.

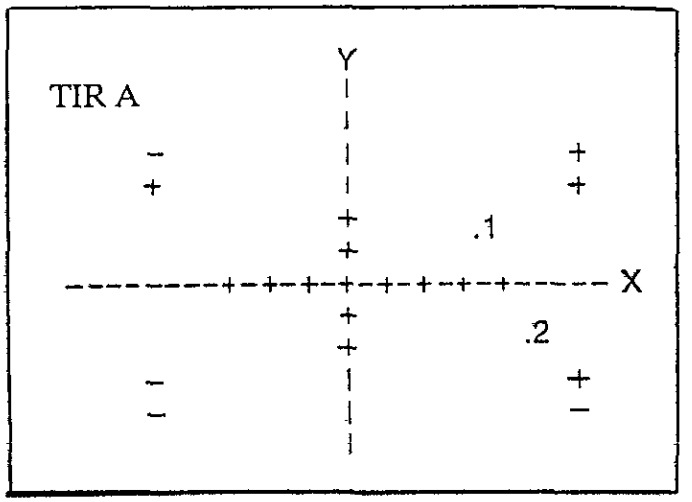
Command and signal: All signal items are included, and the command post location is given.

The German Army uses a terrain indicator reference system for calling in spot reports, using the X and Y axes of the geometric plane as shown in the sketch. The X coordinate is given first, the Y coordinate second. Distance is in hundreds of meters. The center of the coordinate axis will usually be the intersection of grid lines, with A being the center of the reference system. Point one would be A plus 30, plus 20. Point two would be A plus 40, minus 20. (This is written A + 30, + 20 and A + 40, − 10. "Three zero" (30) is equal to 30 × 100 meters, or 3 kilometers.

The primary route is given in the execution paragraph. The patrol leader also selects alternate routes he can use if, for some reason, he cannot follow the planned primary route and must bypass certain areas. He gives these routes to his headquarters and to the assistant patrol leader, and he mentions them in the operations order.

Points along the primary route should be numbered in sequence, for example, from 1 to 7 along an east-west axis. Odd and even numbers can be used to indicate the checkpoints on the alternate routes. An alternate route to the north of the primary route, with checkpoints at major towns or road intersections, can use odd numbers—9, 11, 13, 15, 17—while an alternate route to the south can be numbered with even ones—8, 10, 12, 14.

These numbers allow a patrol leader to give a quick fragmentary order to his assistant and to his higher headquarters



without looking for town names, grids, or reference system coordinates. For example, "Bypass 2, 11, 13, 4," would indicate to headquarters that the patrol leader has selected an alternate route that leaves the primary route at 2, goes north to 11 and 13, and rejoins the primary route at 4.

When leaving the assembly area, the patrol may stop enroute to the passage point to observe for enemy activity. They do not assume that the enemy reconnaissance elements are not active or that they are only in front of the line of departure (LD) or line of contact (LC). When the patrol reaches the passage point, it displays a recognition signal, usually a colored flag, which will be answered by the forward unit.

When establishing contact with the forward security elements, the patrol stops at a distance of 50 meters from the actual passage point so as not to give away the positions occupied by those elements. The patrol is usually met by a soldier who will lead the patrol leader and a scout to the commander of the forward element. The assistant patrol leader, meanwhile, remains with the vehicles and assumes command. He sees to it that the .50 caliber machinegun on the trail vehicle is turned rearward and that 360-degree security is established. The engines of the vehicles are then turned off and the scouts observe and listen.

The most important aspects of the passage of lines are to speak slowly and listen carefully so that the commander of the forward security element (particularly if he is an allied soldier) will understand the information the patrol has and its questions. The forward unit's information may be more recent than that in the patrol's OPORD, and the changes, if any, could affect the patrol's mission.

When it departs, the patrol avoids exposing the forward unit's location to the enemy, and moves one terrain feature away before crossing the LD/LC. It does not use a road close to the passage point unless the forward unit has told it to do so. Even though German doctrine states that the patrol will "continue its travel away from its own guarding security force," the selection of which route to take is left to the discretion of the patrol leader.

Following its crossing of the LD/LC, the patrol moves quickly in travelling formation to take advantage of the overwatch cover afforded by the forward unit. The scouts, however, still remain alert.

After moving out of overwatch range, the patrol begins a bounding movement using standard "set-move" drills. The terrain will dictate the distance between bounds. Visual contact is maintained between vehicles. The scouts use caution at the outset of the mission to ensure that they do not miss any initial enemy forces and lose an opportunity to break radio listening silence at the earliest possible moment.

As it moves along, the patrol makes every effort to obtain information. The primary route stated in the order and possible enemy locations were probably based on intelligence estimates or a map reconnaissance. Once on the ground, though, the patrol leader may discover that the actual terrain gives the enemy other locations in which he can position his armored vehicles, artillery, or forward supply depots. The patrol leader uses his initiative and thoroughly scans these areas.

In Europe, there are many areas where the terrain resembles a bowl. Large, wide valleys surrounded by ridgelines offer excellent areas from which to observe for enemy activity, and the patrol stops and dismounts to do this. Depending on the time restrictions, the patrol leader determines how many observation halts he can afford to make. He takes advantage of the terrain, conceals his vehicles, and turns the engines off when he dismounts his scouts.

Roads can often be found on ridgelines, and the vehicles using them will often be skylined, especially if the area is not densely forested. The leader takes time to check the ridgelines to his left and right, as well as forward and rearward, for convoys or single vehicles.

The key to reconnaissance is stealth and proper observation. Although the patrol members may believe that they are in a particular belt of the enemy's defense, they must not focus their observation entirely in that area. For example, if the patrol believes it is in the enemy's main defensive belt, it must not look for tanks only. Tanks need Class III and V supplies, which means that trucks and supply vehicles may also be in the area.

Scouts scan the terrain first with naked eye, in 50-meter belts, left to right, then right to left, looking for unnatural patterns on the landscape. Then they scan with binoculars. The scouting thought process is deliberate, inquisitive, and persistent. The following are examples of the process:

- Check a town for enemy tactical signs, flags, command vehicles, and antennas.
- Check road junctions for tactical road signs and vehicle tracks.
- Check the areas of high elevation for antennas and relay stations.
- Check open areas for artillery.
- Scan woodlines for movement, dismounted troops, and sunlight reflecting off windshields or headlights.
- Check bridges for engineer activity.

At all times, a scout thinks, "What would I place here if I were the enemy?" And once he sees something, he waits patiently and gives the situation time to develop; then he reports quickly and accurately. Important vehicles may move into the area, and this information will help higher headquarters determine the nature of the enemy's operations.

The patrol also moves to different vantage points and dismounts to observe enemy activities from different angles. At the first location, for instance, scouts may see only one tank, but from the second they may see two more. Because commanders base their decisions on information the scouts gather, the patrol leader makes sure that information is accurate and thorough.

The enemy situation and the terrain always dictate the best methods to use for maneuver. Scouts must make the terrain their ally, because they will have few other friends on the battlefield.

Although German doctrine dictates that large towns be bypassed, the mission and the route of march may require a patrol to move through certain towns. When going into a village or town, the patrol leader must make sure his vehicles are close

The patrol leader and his RTO *prepare the order.*

together (50 meters) and properly spaced. The first vehicle does not wait at the town limits for the second vehicle, because this will place the first one in danger of sniper fire from the outlying buildings. The patrol's motion is fluid and uninterrupted. The order for passage includes the route through town, speed, distance between vehicles, locations of near and far side rally points, hatch position (open or closed), direction of weapons, and actions at the far side of the town.

A contingency plan for the second vehicle is also issued in the event something happens to the first one. The line of sight between vehicles is maintained. If they are too far apart to support each other, especially around curves and buildings, they can be engaged and destroyed piecemeal.

Drivers and track commanders look for the enemy's tactical signs in towns while the soldiers go into a low crouch to present less of a target for snipers. Rear scouts observe obliquely to opposite sides of the street.

Once the patrol has reached the far side of town, the lead vehicle does not expose itself but halts, dismounting scouts if necessary, scanning the area to the patrol's front. The second vehicle orients its primary weapon to the rear while the scouts observe left and right. In this manner, 360-degree security is maintained.

WOODED AREA

German doctrine also states that the patrol should avoid moving through wooded areas, but again the mission may dictate otherwise. Before entering a large wooded area, the patrol leader issues a contingency order. This order is exactly the same as the one for moving through a town except that the locations of listening halts are included.

Once the patrol is about 200 meters inside the woodline, the vehicles stop, the drivers turn their engines off, and the patrol members remove their CVC helmets and listen for voices, vehicle noises, or sounds of battle. One crew member keeps his headset on and monitors the radio. After 30 to 40 seconds, the patrol leader uses hand signals to order the vehicles restarted.

The lead crew remains alert with the driver watching for mines and vehicle tracks in the road and the patrol leader watching for enemy tactical road signs. He also looks far enough ahead on his map to judge where the next listening halt will be. The patrol can stop before major trail junctions and, if necessary, dismount and clear an intersection.

The patrol moves quickly in a close travelling formation, with a distance of 50 meters or less between vehicles. If the patrol is ambushed from the flanks, it continues on, returning fire and throwing smoke to obscure its movement. If attacked from the front, the patrol returns fire, throws smoke, and seeks a bypass. Under no circumstances does the patrol stop and fight in the woods when engaged by small arms. If it is ambushed, it moves swiftly away from the danger area.

The patrol does not stop for long to clear the far side of the woods. Whether it stops at all is up to the discretion of the patrol leader, who must weigh the danger behind him against the open area to his front. If no enemy is detected, the patrol halts while still concealed, dismounts, and clears the open area to its front. The rear track orients its weapon system to the rear, and the scouts guard the flanks. The front vehicle must not be observed breaking the shadow line but must remain undetected. The patrol leader stops as far as 50 meters before an open area to dismount and clear.

If scouts dismount from the lead vehicle, they make sure they do not expose themselves by running down the middle of a road or trail toward the end of the woodline. They remain concealed, dismounting directly into the woods. When clearing the open area to their front, the scouts avoid detection by staying in the shadows.

If the patrol encounters a disabled vehicle at any time, the track that first observes it issues a short, concise warning—for example, "Action left, disabled vehicle, out," or "Destroyed vehicle, 11 o'clock, 200 meters, out." Immediate action follows. The patrol leader's vehicle moves near the destroyed vehicle. The assistant patrol leader moves forward to overwatch, dismounting his scouts as the terrain dictates to establish security. The assistant patrol leader turns his engine off and listens while his driver monitors the radio.

If there appears to be action near the vehicle, the patrol leader opens fire. His vehicle then halts and its engine is turned off. The patrol leader dismounts with two scouts and observes the area for booby-trapped items. Weapons are moved away from the dead or injured and collected in a pile to be destroyed when the patrol leaves. The vehicle is rushed by the patrol leader and his scouts. They enter it in more than one place—through the rear hatch and either the commander's hatch or the driver's hatch. In the case of a wheeled vehicle, the patrol members rush the passenger compartment from both sides. The patrol members, through rehearsal, can ensure that their areas of fire or search do not cross.

DESTROYED VEHICLE

While the search is being conducted, the .50 caliber machinegun is manned by the vehicle's RTO, who is listening for movement and providing local security. He also secures the rear of the patrol's area, while the driver monitors the radio.

The destroyed vehicle is thoroughly searched. If bodies must be moved, the patrol makes sure they are not booby-trapped. One man always provides security, and the patrol members always have writing materials for recording information. Items of interest to the patrol are vehicle markings, radio frequencies, weapons found, uniform information (nationality, branch, rank), ammunition and foodstuffs, recent activity, and maps.

Any bridges the patrol encounters must be cleared in an expedient manner when time is short, which is most often the case when a patrol is forced to move quickly to its objective.

The most basic element of a hasty bridge clearing is security. If the patrol leader has done a thorough map reconnaissance, he should know when he will have to clear bridges before he reaches them. During his map reconnaissance, therefore, the leader should consider the following in detail:

- Possibilities of approaching the water under cover.

Scouts must dismount often.

• Fording sites.

• Cover and concealment for combat vehicles waiting to cross.

• *Observation points* for detailed observation of the far side of the bank.

When the patrol actually approaches a bridge, the trail vehicle orients its weapons to the rear and the scouts dismount, as necessary, to provide security. The engines of both vehicles are shut off. Scouts from the lead vehicle dismount and secure the near side, stopping before going down the bank to the road or stream below. The front vehicle overwatches forward. As the scouts clear the near side, they check the abutments, stringers, and supporting pillars of the bridge. The Germans emphasize that, if time allows, the supporting pillars under water should be checked for explosives.

When the scouts have finished clearing the near side, they move across the bridge one at a time. The first man across waits and provides security for the second. They then perform the same drill they did on the near side. Once this drill is complete, one scout waits on the far side as the second scout proceeds to clear the area in front of the bridge. The distance is usually not more than 100 meters. Once the far side is cleared, the lead vehicle moves across the bridge, conducts a more thorough clearing of the terrain, and signals the second vehicle to proceed.

The German doctrine for action on contact with inferior enemy infantry is quite clear. If the patrol unexpectedly meets the enemy infantry at close range, it must "penetrate through the enemy" while firing its weapons, at the same time throwing smoke to obscure enemy observation. The vehicles must remain close while fighting through the enemy. As the patrol leaves the danger area, the rear track orients its weapons to the rear and watches for any possible mounted counterattack.

When the reconnaissance patrol comes upon superior dismounted forces, such as infantry with antiarmor weapons, its actions are determined by whether or not the patrol has been detected. The patrol members are never to fire unless they are fired upon.

If detected, the patrol fires and throws smoke, moving away quickly. A general rule to follow when bypassing is to move one terrain feature away from the danger areas. Knowledge of the range of enemy weapon systems can be quite useful. The patrol will then know how far to bypass if the terrain cannot obscure its movement.

When encountering either superior or inferior enemy forces, the lead vehicle radios an alert order to the trail vehicle as to what the patrol is facing. Never should only half of the patrol members be informed of the situation. If the rear vehicle believes, for example, that the patrol has been attacked by a superior force, it will turn around and move away to find a bypass. But if the patrol has actually come upon an inferior force, the lead vehicle will attack through. The patrol will then be split, with the rear track seeking a bypass and the front track increasing its speed and attacking. An alert to the trail vehicle takes only a second and this will keep the entire patrol informed and consistent in its reaction to enemy contact.

The battle drill for a surprise encounter with enemy armor is to move away quickly. Throwing smoke when spotted by tanks at a great distance may serve only to mark the patrol's position. The patrol leader must determine whether or not smoke is to be used on the basis of the tactical situation. If the patrol is not spotted, it is best to dismount and observe, unless there is no available cover and concealment. If the patrol sees only one tank, it takes the time to look for more, because tanks rarely operate alone. One terrain feature can be bypassed or a concealed route used to move out of the range of the main gun. Reports are rendered quickly and accurately.

Barriers or obstacles that are detected early enough are always bypassed. If the patrol has time, it observes for any enemy activity and reports on the specifics of the barriers. The *Bundeswehr* expects the enemy to cover barriers with fire, thereby increasing the value of the obstacle. Barriers can be

expected to be booby-trapped and any mines to have anti-handling devices. Crews must be aware of changes in the shape, color, and condition of the soil. Further, they must be alert to changes in the condition of the grass, if there is any, and to wires on the ground. If the patrol is surprised by superior enemy forces, however, it returns fire, throws smoke to conceal its movement, and bypasses the obstacle.

In any combat situation, the death of the leader is a traumatic event for a small element. If a unit is ambushed and the leader dies, the reaction must be immediate. The patrol returns fire, moves swiftly away from the danger area, reports to higher headquarters, reorganizes, and continues its mission.

The most important step when a patrol leader is killed is to get the word to the assistant patrol leader. The senior ranking soldier assumes command of the patrol leader's vehicle, lets the assistant patrol leader know what has happened, and continues his radio transmission until the assistant patrol leader acknowledges receipt of the information. The assistant patrol leader, understanding where the enemy is, issues orders to move away quickly. He then chooses a rally point—usually not more than 500 to 700 meters away, depending on what killed the patrol leader—and informs the other vehicle of the enemy's location. The RTO informs higher headquarters of the patrol leader's death and sends a spot report on what killed him.

Once the rally point is reached, the engines of the vehicles are turned off, and the scouts dismount with M60 machineguns to establish 360-degree security. The .50 caliber machineguns are manned and the new patrol leader and assistant patrol leader review their location and activity. No more than three or four minutes should be taken to discuss a plan of action, including current location, missions to accomplish, and route to the objective.

Principal to the accomplishment of any mission is the patrol's ability to arrive at its objective. Upon reaching the objective, the patrol leader informs his commander that the patrol has arrived and specifies the time.

The overall concept of the actions on the objective follows this general format: The patrol leader informs his patrol that it has reached the objective. The RTO logs this and sends the report to higher headquarters. The vehicles are placed in primary positions, following a quick clearing of the area by dismounted scouts. The vehicles' engines are shut off, the vehicles are concealed and so positioned as to have easy access to the primary avenues of approach. The patrol leader and assistant patrol leader, along with four scouts, move to the best vantage point and set up an OP. Security is established, M60 machineguns are emplaced on the left and right flanks, and the "OP team" begins watching for enemy activity.

Once the OP is in place, the patrol leader places the assistant patrol leader in charge and returns to the vehicles. He quickly establishes secondary and night fighting positions. If he has enough time, he also considers the following:

- Alternate positions.
- Positions for the night.
- Reporting and contact routes.
- Possibilities of placing barriers.
- Observation and effective areas.
- Detailing of alarm posts.
- Manning of radio equipment.
- Behavior in the event of enemy observation.
- Creation of a range card.
- NBC defense measures.
- Camouflage discipline and camouflage work.
- Details of night vision and sighting equipment usage.
- Details on checking identity of personnel.
- Creation of barriers, installation of alarm charges and ground flares.

If he has very little time, he limits his efforts to the following:

- Finding positions for the vehicles.
- Dividing areas of observation, security, and fire.
- Detailing alarm posts and emplacing guards.
- Issuing instructions on alarms and giving contingency plans if contact occurs.

If the patrol leader returns to the OP to help out, one of the scouts takes charge of the vehicles and makes sure the RTO records spot reports and transmits them, quickly and accurately, to higher headquarters. He also ensures that security is established and maintained, and that the positions are improved.

Scout and reconnaissance patrol leaders must always keep the following in mind as they go about the business of training their units:

- Flexibility is the key to success in combat. Scouts must be innovative and exercise tactical initiative.
- Scouts should maneuver as much as possible, because they cannot become proficient and combat ready without considerable practice.
- Reconnaissance does not equate to direct combat. Stealth, security, and proper maneuver are the important elements of a reconnaissance patrol.
- Reports must be accurate, thorough, and timely, because senior commanders base many of their decisions on intelligence gathered by reconnaissance units. Scouts must not exaggerate, but report exactly what they see.
- Ignorance in training results in lessons learned. Ignorance in combat results in casualties.

At the small unit level, we must outsmart and outscout our adversaries. Battles are not won by those who have the most resources, but by those who are the most resourceful.

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